

It is my intention to write several short stories based on reminiscences of people who have had the good fortune to meet Savarkar. This is my aunt, Mrs. Nirmala Vaidya's, story. I loved it when she told it to me and I was sorry I could not include it in my novel.

Savarkarian Subtlety

Savarkar had just returned to Bombay after his meeting with Sir Stafford Cripps. Great things were expected from Cripps, even a solution for the deadlock in the Indian political situation. What had Savarkar and Cripps said to each other? That was the burning question. Everyone around Savarkar had a great curiosity to know the answer. Eighteen-year-old Nirmala was no exception. She had been counting the days, minutes, seconds until Savarkar got back. She had to know the answer to that question—she just *had* to know it! And now.

But how? Approaching Savarkar directly was impossible. She, like everyone else, was in great awe of him. He never raised his voice, was always soft-spoken, and didn't ever express his anger if he felt it. But his intellect, his magnetic personality, his repartee set him apart. It would be quite an impertinence to ask such a question to him.

Nirmala was not one to give up easily! There was only one person who could perhaps get away with it: Prabhat, her dear friend and Savarkar's daughter. He doted on her, everyone knew that. She hotfooted it to Prabhat's side.

"Psst, Prabhat!" Nirmala whispered urgently.

"Nirmala! Why are you whispering?" exclaimed Prabhat, looking up from her reading. "What's going on . . . ?" She had noticed Nirmala's air of barely contained excitement.

"Ooh, Prabhat! You must, must, *must* do me a favor!" said Nirmala grabbing Prabhat's arm and dragging her towards the door.

"I will, Nirmala, I will," laughed Prabhat, allowing herself to be pulled. "But what do I have to do?"

"Nothing much! Just ask Tatyia what he and Sir Cripps talked about."

"What!" Prabhat came to a screeching halt, and now the dragging started in the opposite direction. "Are you crazy? Never! I cannot do such a thing."

"Yes, you can," coaxed Nirmala. "Does he not love you a lot?"

"Ye-e-e-s, but . . . but . . ."

"Don't you want to know what happened between them?"

"To tell the truth, Nirmala, I re-e-e-ally want to know. But it never occurred to me to ask!"

"Well, now it has. This is our opportunity. He is by himself right now. The coast is clear."

“Well . . . maybe . . .” Prabhat allowed herself to be drawn towards Savarkar’s room. “He won’t be upset, I hope.”

“Well, if he is a bit, it’s okay. He won’t scold, I’m sure!”

“But his eyes, Nirmala! That *look* . . . ! I shall sink through the floor if he looks at me like that.”

“Be brave, Prabhat! You are Savarkar’s daughter.”

They had now arrived outside Savarkar’s door. Both girls stood close, clutching each other’s arms for courage. Prabhat knocked timidly and poked her head in. Nirmala peeked over her shoulder.

“Prabhe, Nirmala, what brings you here?” said Savarkar, surprised to see them.

Prabhat ventured into the room on reluctant feet. With Nirmala’s hand urging her forward from behind, there wasn’t much choice.

“Tatya . . . Tatya . . .”

“Yes, Prabhe? Anything wrong?”

“I . . . we . . .” Prabhat swallowed and then the words tumbled out. “What did you say to Sir Cripps, Tatya?”

Savarkar looked at them for a moment. “I told him, Prabhe, that I have two little girls here whom it is very necessary to consult before we make any decision about our Hindustan!” he said, quite gently.

These gentle words had an electrifying result. With one mind both girls turned about and fled out of the room.